REMARKS

The present application was filed on January 19, 2001, and claims priority from provisional application Serial No. 60/195,506 filed April 6, 2000.

Applicants initially note that the Examiner has failed to acknowledge the domestic priority claim made by the present application. Proper acknowledgment of said priority claim is respectfully solicited.

Applicants filed formal drawings in the present application on May 1, 2001. The Examiner has failed to acknowledge receipt and entry of these previously-filed formal drawings. Proper acknowledgment of receipt and entry of said formal drawings is respectfully solicited.

The Examiner has objected to the abstract. Applicants have amended the abstract in a manner which is believed to address the objection.
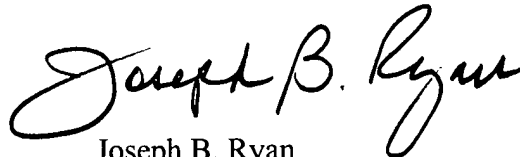
Applicants have amended each of independent claims 1 and 23-25 to specify that the stream of information bits comprises at least one frame of information bits separated into a plurality of different classes of bits, with each class of bits comprising a plurality of contiguous bits of the frame. Furthermore, these claims as amended specify that each of the portions of the stream of information bits comprises a corresponding one of the different classes of bits within the at least one frame, and that the at least one code is selected so as to provide different amounts of error protection for at least a subset of the different classes of bits. Support for the amendment can be found, for example, in the illustrative embodiments of FIGS. 5 and 6, and the corresponding text at page 9, line 24, to page 11, line 4. Certain of the added limitations were present in originally-filed dependent claim 16, which is now canceled.

It is believed that U.S. Patent No. 5,323,424 (hereinafter "Fazel"), relied upon by the Examiner, discloses nothing more than a type of conventional multilevel coding similar to that already acknowledged as prior art by Applicants in the background portion of their specification at page 2, lines 13-25. There is no disclosure or suggestion in Fazel or the other art of record, taken alone or in any combination, regarding the provision of unequal error protection for different bit classes as claimed.

10

Dependent claims 17 and 18 have each been written in independent form, and are believed to define patentable subject matter over conventional multilevel coding as described in Fazel. Moreover, each of these claims as amended specifies that a given part referred to therein comprises a plurality of contiguous bits of the corresponding frame. One possible example of an illustrative arrangement of the type claimed in one or more of claims 17 and 18 as amended is shown in FIG. 7 of the drawings, and is described in the corresponding text at page 11, lines 5-28, and page 12, lines 5-12, of the specification. Claims 17 and 18 as amended are not taught or suggested by conventional multilevel coding of the type disclosed in Fazel, or any of the other prior art of record, in any combination.

In view of the foregoing, claims 1-15 and 17-25 as amended are believed to be in condition for allowance. Applicants respectfully request the withdrawal of the claim rejections.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: June 25, 2004

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11